

AN ETYMOLOGICAL NOTE:

PIE **Hs-tér*- “STAR”

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The origin of the Proto-Indo-European word for “star” has long been the subject of debate. On the basis of the forms found in the Indo-European daughter languages, there can be no question that the term is Common Indo-European: Hitt. *ḫašter*-, Ved. (pl.) *stṛbhīḥ* (also Skt. *tārā* “star”, *tārā-ḥ* “sparkling”, *tāraka-m* “star”, *tārakita-ḥ* “starry”), Av. *stərəbyō*, Gk. ἀστήρ (also pl. τεῖρεα “stars”), Arm. *astl*, Lat. *stēlla* (← **ster-elā*), Goth. *stairnō*, OHG. *sterno*, OE. *steorra*, Olce. *stjarna*, Corn. *sterenn*, Toch. B *ściryē*, etc.

Recently, the Soviet scholars Thomas V. Gamkrelidze and Vjačeslav V. Ivanov (1984.II:685-86; 1985:41-42, fn. 42) have attempted to revive the old theory that the Indo-European word for “star”, which Gamkrelidze-Ivanov reconstruct as ***Hast**[^h]**er**-, could have been a borrowing from Semitic. The Soviet Semiticist Igor M. Diakonoff (1985:122-23), however, has raised several objections against this theory. Diakonoff notes first that there are semantic difficulties involved since the basic meaning of the Proto-Semitic term, which Diakonoff reconstructs as **ač-tr*- (traditional **aṭtar*-, fem. **aṭtar-t*-), appears to have been “god(dess)” and not “star”, though later, as a secondary development in several Semitic daughter languages, it is used to designate the planet Venus. It may be mentioned here that the term is also used in the Semitic daughter languages as the proper name of a deity (in Akkadian it is identified with the Sumerian goddess ^d*Inana*), namely, the deity of sex and strife. Next, Diakonoff notes that there are phonetic difficulties involved as well.

In my opinion, we need search no further than within Indo-European itself for an understanding of the origin of the term for “star” — it is simply a derivative of the root which Pokorny (1959:68-69) reconstructs as **ās*- “to burn, glow”. The Proto-Indo-European form is to be reconstructed as **Hs-tér*- and

originally meant something like “the burning, glowing, shining thing or object”.

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